



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Routine Pap tests detect precancerous conditions

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Whitney Mitchell of Decatur was diagnosed with cervical cancer in May of 2004. She had not had a Pap smear in six years and went to see her physician because she "just wasn't feeling well." She says she is "so thankful that I went in to see my doctor. I'm doing great after my surgeries and plan to follow up with my physician every three months."

A Pap test, also known as a Pap smear, is a way to examine cells collected from the cervix. Routine Pap testing can prevent cervical cancer by detecting precancerous conditions.

When a health care professional performs a Pap test, he or she takes a small sample of cells from a woman's cervix to be tested. This exam is quick and painless. The sample is sent to a lab to be studied under a microscope. The clinician will let you know the results.

According to the National Cervical Cancer Coalition, about 55 million Pap tests are performed each year in the United States. Of these, approximately 3.5 million (6 percent) are abnormal and require medical follow-up.

When a woman receives abnormal results from a Pap test, a clinician will refer her for follow-up testing. Cells on the surface of the cervix sometimes appear abnormal but are very rarely cancerous. Further testing will determine the cause of the abnormal results.

To assure that the Pap test results are as accurate as possible, women can do the following things before their annual exam:

- try not to schedule the test during you period
- do not douche for 48 hours before the test
- do not have sex for 48 hours before the test
- do not use tampons, birth control foams, jellies or other vaginal creams or medicines for 48 hours before the test.

The American Cancer Society recommends that if a woman age 30 or older has had three normal Pap test results in a row, she may be screened every two to three years with either the regular or liquid-based Pap test.

For additional information about cervical cancer, please call one of the following toll-free numbers:

1-800-ACS-2345 American Cancer Society

1-800-4-CANCER National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service

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